



Tripler Army Medical Center

News Release

JCAHO Accreditation with Commendation 1998 - 2001

For Immediate Release
Release Number 00-110

Contact: Tripler Public Affairs Office, 808-433-5785
Oct. 23, 2000

Medical Conditions with Educational Implications diagnosed faster with Project ASSIST

By Suzan Holl
Tripler Army Medical Center Public Affairs Office

HONOLULU – Tripler Army Medical Center Department of Pediatrics and Pacific e-Health Innovations Center have developed an internet-based method of assessing children for medical conditions with educational implications that should increase the efficiency and speed of the process that identifies these conditions in elementary school children.

Project ASSIST – Augmentation of Special-needs Services and Information to Students and Teachers – is a collaborative effort between the Hawaii Departments of Education and Health, Department of Defense and the University of Hawaii. Its goal is to increase and enhance services provided for all special needs students in the state.

Implementation of Project ASSIST will initially begin in target schools located on military installations and eventually throughout Oahu. The first two schools targeted are Hale Kula and Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary.

“We hope to start these two schools in January 2001, and open it up to the other schools with military children at the beginning of the next school year,” said Dr. Thomas Gallagher, Director of Tripler’s Office for Special Needs and Services and a developmental pediatrician.

The program will aid teachers in identifying young students who may be struggling with learning disabilities such as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Central Auditory Processing Disorder, Autistic Spectrum Disorder, and Dyslexia. It also provides teachers with an educational web site and the delivery of physical and or occupational therapy for students by licensed/certified therapists while being supervised by occupational and physical therapists via internet/ web-based technology.

“In the past we have had an extensive wait-list to evaluate children for these conditions,” Gallagher said.

Project ASSIST will aid in making a faster diagnosis by allowing teachers and parents access to questionnaires through its web site. Once these are completed, the web-based server scores them, and the student is observed in the classroom via video that is controlled by a staff member located in another room of the school or at Tripler. It is concealed so as not to disrupt the classroom.

If there are concerns related to learning, and the school has not already completed educational/intellectual testing, this will be accomplished.

“Once the questionnaires and the video are evaluated, a meeting is held with the parents to eliminate any possibility of more plausible explanations of the inattentiveness. Learning disorders, other psychiatric conditions or an unstable home life such as divorce, or even a deployed parent, can have a strong effect on a child’s schoolwork and behavior,” Gallagher said.

“If one of the parents is angered by an unfaithful spouse, and there is a lot of crying and yelling at home, chances are there is a more plausible explanation for the inattentiveness than Attention Deficit Disorder that’s causing the child to have a hard time learning,” Gallagher said.

After questionnaires, video, and information provided by the parents are assessed, the therapist can make his recommendations as to whether further diagnostic testing is needed to identify a learning disability or if the child and parents need to begin psychological counseling.

Using Project ASSIST will save a considerable amount of evaluation time. “We expect that the length of time will decrease from the six-month backlog in the past to less than a month in the future,” Gallagher said.

###

